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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
15 April 1975

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Indochina
(As of 1600 EDST)
No. 13

CAMBODIA

1. The Khmer Communists appear on the verge of taking Phnom Penh.

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A late report also indicates that insurgent forces have captured Takhmau, the capital's southern suburb.

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government units have abandoned all positions on the east bank of the Mekong River opposite downtown Phnom Penh. The Cambodian officer estimated that the city would fall within a day and said that the navy was planning to run the Mekong River -- presumably to South Vietnam -- with its remaining craft.

2. On the opposite side of the city, battlelines around Pochentong airport are running roughly along the railway embankment about a mile north of the airfield. A small insurgent force yesterday penetrated into the market just north-east of the airstrip but was quickly forced to withdraw. The main highway between Phnom Penh and Pochentong was cut late today, however, and the airport was reportedly being hit by machine gun and mortar fire.

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VIETNAM

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Xuan Loc

5. South Vietnamese forces have expanded their holdings both east and west of Xuan Loc. The government units attempting to open the road to Saigon are still meeting determined Communist resistance, however, and their progress has been slow. Although there is a shortage of food in the city, some of the civilians who fled from the city to the surrounding countryside are beginning to trickle back.

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The artillery bombardments together with suspected sapper attacks within the airbase resulted in the temporary closing of the jet fighter airstrip and destroyed large quantities of fuel and munitions. If these attacks continue, air operations in support of South Vietnamese forces around Xuan Loc, will be sharply curtailed.

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Fighting Increases Outside of Phan Rang

7. Yesterday's shelling of Phan Rang City has been followed by a number of ground attacks on government defensive positions to the north and west of the city. Although most government forces are holding firm, one Ranger battalion, however, has been forced to pull back. The regional commander, General Toan, has decided to postpone the withdrawal of the remainder of the Airborne brigade which has been the backbone of the government's defense line.

8. The commander of the forward regional headquarters, at Phan Rang now has the Airborne and Ranger units deployed north and northeast of the airbase and the two 2nd Division regiments to the west and northwest of the airbase. Territorial forces have the responsibility of defending Phan Rang City -- located some five miles southeast of the airbase -- and the immediate surrounding area.

The Situation in the Delta

9. Fighting is still underway in Vinh Long Province across the river from Can Tho as the Communists continue to threaten Route 4. Early on April 15, Communist gunners fired an ineffective mortar barrage at the Binh Thuy Airbase outside Can Tho, and later fired some 50 rounds of mortar into Cai Lay District town at a critical road junction.

10. To the north in Duong Tuong Province, the North Vietnamese 8th Division has been redeploying in preparation for its long-expected campaign to cut Route 4. If the 8th Division coordinates its attacks on Route 4 with the North Vietnamese 5th Division farther north in Long An Province, the South Vietnamese 7th Division will be hard pressed to keep this vital link to Saigon open.

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The Political Situation

11. A recent sampling of South Vietnamese opinion since early April reflects a mood of pessimism within official circles. The sampling was made before President Ford's address to Congress on April 10 and the recent creditable showing by the South Vietnamese military at Xuan Loc and in the delta. It seems unlikely, however, that these developments, in themselves, have been enough to alter what appears to be a general conviction that adequate US support will not be forthcoming and that the Communists now are simply too strong for the South Vietnamese military to hold indefinitely.

12. The most immediate concern of most South Vietnamese, especially those who have worked closely with the Americans, is "what happens if." Reassurances that they will be evacuated are much sought after. Some middle-level government officials are adopting an attitude that the Americans are their "only card" left -- and that their evacuation should not be permitted unless guarantees for their safety are made. A former cabinet official, believes that large-scale evacuation would be nearly impossible and that once it begins, government troops would fire on anyone trying to leave. Another government politician feels that as soon as the Communists begin hitting the government's defenses around Saigon, there will be wholesale panic similar to that at Da Nang and that evacuation from Tan Son Nhut Airport would not be feasible because of the chaos.

13. A sense of impending disaster also permeates the military. Some senior military officials reportedly are readying various evacuation schemes of their own. "Several generals" reportedly have commandeered a boat which will be used to evacuate themselves and their families. Air Force personnel reportedly have made preparations to move themselves and their families out of Saigon on Vietnamese Air Force planes and Navy personnel are making similar preparations using navy boats and aircraft.

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